

**Minutes**

*Meeting opened 5.30 pm*

**1. ATTENDANCE:**

**PRESENT:**

Members

Dr Jocelyn Davies (Chair)	Ex CSIRO / geographer
Mr Eli Melki	Alice Springs Town Council
Mr Steven O’Burtill	Alice Springs resident (former golf club manager / irrigator)
Mr Adam Davis	Power & Water Corporation
Ms Wendy Stuart	Central Land Council
Mr Rod Cramer	Rural residents association
Mr Glenn Marshall	Alice Springs resident (urban water efficiency expert)
Mr Richie Hayes	Agriculture/Horticulture representative
Mr Jimmy Cocking	Arid Lands Environment Centre

DENR representatives (Non-members)

Mr Robbie Henderson	DENR Water Planner
Ms Sarah Fairhead	DENR Director Southern Region

**APOLOGIES:**

Ms Robyn Grey-Gardner	Alice Springs resident (water quality expert)
Ms Veronica Lynch	Indigenous / cultural representative

**NEW ACTION ITEMS**

Action No.	Action details	Action Officer	Status
1.1	<i>Members to identify a proxy and provide their contact details to Robbie at DENR prior to or at the next ASWAC meeting</i>	All members	Pending
1.2	<i>All Members to fill out the declaration of interests register form (hard copy or electronic) and provide to Robbie at DENR prior to or at the next ASWAC meeting.</i>	All members	Pending
1.3	<i>Draft proposed changes to the TOR for circulation to members prior to the next ASWAC meeting</i>  <i>Read and suggest any other changes to the draft TOR, which may be emailed to Robbie or Jocelyn</i>	Robbie Henderson  All members	Pending
1.4	<i>Prepare a ‘bio’ (one or two sentences) to describe yourself for the website and email to Robbie or Jocelyn.</i>	All members	Pending

1.5	<i>Prepare DENR response to questions &amp; matters raised and circulate between meetings</i>	Robbie Henderson	Pending
1.6	<i>Plan an ASWAC field trip</i>	Robbie Henderson / Adam Davis	Pending
1.7	<i>Provide education session on Alice Springs water basics for interested members (outside of ASWAC meeting)</i>	Robbie Henderson	Pending

## RESOLUTIONS

Resolution No.	Resolution
N/A	Nil

## 2. WELCOME AND INTRODUCTION

Jocelyn Davies (Chair) opened the meeting and welcomed everyone. Sarah Fairhead provided a welcome to ASWAC members from the Department of Environment and Natural Resources (DENR) and spoke briefly about the value of the Committee to water resource planning. Members introduced themselves and highlighted water issues that were of particular interest.

## 3. ASWAC TOR & OPERATING ARRANGEMENTS

Jocelyn Davies tabled the draft ASWAC TOR and provided a quick overview, focusing on the broad purpose of the Committee and section #3 'Terms of Reference.'

### Proxy members

Arrangements for proxy members (highlighted in draft TOR) were proposed as follows: Members to identify one alternate who would attend meetings, if necessary, on a member's behalf. Proxies and members are not to attend the same meeting. Proxies to be provided with all relevant information concerning a meeting/s they will attend as well as the usual member.

### **ACTION:**

*Members to identify a proxy and provide their contact details to Robbie at DENR prior to or at the next ASWAC meeting*

### Conflict of interest

Members were requested to fill out a declaration of interests form (form provided) declaring any interests that could potentially be in conflict with ASWAC business. The definition of conflict of interest was discussed. It was concluded that conflict of interest applies when matters have a link to personal financial gain of a member, but also extends to non-financial interests, such as affiliations or personal relationships.

It was agreed that the conflict of interest register would be confidential and available only to the Chair and DENR.

### **ACTION:**

*All Members to fill out the declaration of interests register form (hard copy or electronic) and provide to Robbie at DENR prior to or at the next ASWAC meeting.*

## Comments & suggested changes to TOR

The following comments and suggestions were received:

- A general TOR provides flexibility, but it would be useful to mention important specific tasks so they are not lost.
- Include a TOR item on risk, incorporating risk assessment and 'risk appetite.' Examples provided included risk to water supply and risk of mining exemptions from the Water Act. The value of the Alice Springs Town Council's 'Risk Audit Committee' was mentioned.
- Include TOR item about informing the Committee, i.e. so that emphasis was not predominantly on 'taking' from the Committee, but also 'giving.'
- Include TOR item on financial /economic matters concerning water, for example to generate discussion of costs and benefits
- TOR should mention links to other committees, in particular the Regional Economic Development Committee, as water underpins economic development.

In addition to the above, the Chair noted the intention to make minutes and information about the Committee publically available on the DENR website. The Chair requested members provide a 'bio' (one or two sentences) to describe themselves for the website.

### **ACTIONS:**

*Robbie Henderson (DENR) to consider and draft changes to the TOR for circulation to members prior to the next ASWAC meeting*

*All members: to read and suggest any other changes to the draft TOR, which may be emailed to Robbie or Jocelyn*

*All members: prepare a 'bio' (one or two sentences) to describe themselves for the website and email to Robbie or Jocelyn.*

## 4. PRESENTATION: Introduction to the Alice Springs Water Allocation Plan & water planning in the NT

A presentation by Robbie Henderson (DENR) was deferred to the next meeting due to time constraints and to ensure sufficient time for Peter Cook's presentation.

## 5. PRESENTATION: Draft report - Improving knowledge of the potential impact of irrigated agriculture on groundwater quality and public water supply: investigations in the Rocky Hill region (Peter Cook)

Peter Cook is from Flinders University in SA and previously worked with CSIRO, and was contracted by DENR to undertake the Rocky Hill study. Peter has worked on groundwater quality issues, including in the NT for more than 20 years. The subject of the current research and draft report is the potential impacts of horticulture on groundwater at Rocky Hill. The research forms part of a broader investigation into regional hydrology that includes the Mereenie Aquifer System and public water supply. Peter thanked Richie Hayes for his support and cooperation that enabled the study to be undertaken. Peter's presentation was approximately 25 minutes in duration and a copy of the PowerPoint was provided to members. The Rocky Hill investigation report is still a draft and has not been released publically.

### Summary: Comments, Q & A

<b>Question / comment</b>	<b>Answer provided</b>
Is their potential for 'short circuiting' (irrigation water moving through fractures / more highly permeable zones)?	Could see little evidence of this

Does the soil clean the irrigation water?	Irrigation water mobilises salts and salty water in the soil by pushing it ahead, water in the unsaturated zone is about ½ as salty as sea water.
Does the finding that contaminants (pesticides etc.) are not present in groundwater tell us anything other than a baseline, given the irrigation water has not reached the water table and won't for many years?	The tests only look at water collected from the water table [hence do not look at contamination potentially present in irrigation water].
Is monitoring happening?	Monitoring requirements are included in the horticulture water licence conditions Licensee is waiting for the department to tell him what [parameters] to monitor
Comment on the increase in horticulture licenced entitlement from 1000 ML/yr to 3125 ML/yr at Rocky Hill; suggestion that the investigation [Peter Cook study] was triggered by the S1 [licence appeal]. Does the current investigation consider the proposed centre pivots associated with the licence increase?	The current investigation only looks at the existing irrigated grape blocks
Is the cleaner water being used for agriculture? [I.e. using water <500 mg/l TDS that is reserved for public water supply]?	Agricultural block was located just outside the Eastern edge of the zone believed to contain the good quality water
Is the Rocky Hill licence increase being considered or is it already approved?	The licence was approved, however an appeal has been lodged and has been considered by the independent Water Resources Review Panel
What is the value of Rocky Hill horticulture (e.g. growing onions & employing temporary FIFO workers) to Alice Springs? Is it worth the risk to future public water supply?	Question rephrased to look more generally at the value of horticulture as a beneficial use of water. It was noted that the role of ASWAC is not about assessing the merits of individual licences, but the broader rules governing issuing of licences. The general question of 'value' would be something that could be answered through research. Examples of the value of the Rocky Hill horticultural enterprise were provided, for example goods and services procured by the temporary workforce.

**ACTION:**

*Robbie Henderson (DENR) to prepare any further DENR response to questions raised and circulate between meetings*

**6. ISSUES / TOPICS / QUESTIONS**

Members identified the following issues, topics and questions that could be the focus of future ASWAC meetings, or addressed between meetings:

- Question about whether the area over Alice Springs water supply aquifers is subject to fracking exploration applications? Suggestion of a presentation about the issue to ASWAC
- What other investigations are taking place or planned with regards to improving the understanding of the aquifers used for public water supply and horticulture? Sarah Fairhead (DENR) provided a quick response that the current study at Rocky Hill is part of a broader investigation into the ground water system; agreed that information can be provided in future meetings.
- Request that Alice Springs water resources maps be made available for the committee. Robbie Henderson (DENR) agreed that maps could be made available.

- Benefits of agribusiness, opportunities & risks
- Environmental assessment reforms – what does this mean for ASWAC?
- Presentations from PAWC, such as usage projections, demand for residential water, etc.
- Improve our understanding of current water supply issues and threats
- Impact of Alice Springs overuse of water, e.g. to the Todd River

The Chair invited each member to provide final comments before closing:

- PAWC could organise or provide tours of the bore field, figures on water consumption, or provide a presentation. Robbie Henderson (DENR) agreed to obtain consumption figures from PAWC for circulation, and look into the possibility of an ASWAC excursion, the later was widely supported.
- ASWAC needs to work and be active in between formal meetings to be effective.
- Is anything from the meeting was confidential? Sarah Fairhead (DENR) responded that and it would be appreciated if members could hold back on sharing information about the Rocky Hill investigation publically prior to its release.
- Recommendation for more formal Chairing of the meeting and keeping the agenda tight
- Acknowledgement that the meeting process will improve and the group will get better at targeting discussions in subsequent meetings. Keen for Robbie Henderson's presentation about ASWAC and water planning
- Clarification sought regarding the role of ASWAC members and Chair with respect to representation to other committees, or to the Minister etc.

**ACTIONS:**

*Robbie Henderson (DENR) to prepare DENR response to matters raised and circulate between meetings*

*Robbie Henderson (DENR) to work with Adam Davis and other members to plan an ASWAC field trip*

*Robbie Henderson (DENR) Provide education session on Alice Springs water basics for interested members (outside of ASWAC meeting)*

## 6. NEXT MEETING

ASWAC field trip proposed for the next meeting, date to be confirmed.